TOWARDS ASSESSING THE CAPABILITY OF INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATIONS TECHNOLOGY (I.C.T) IN THE TEACHING AND LEARNING OF NIGERIAN LANGUAGES

A. N. E. Chima

Abstract

The assessment of I.C.T in coping with the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages represents an appeal designed mainly to explore the assets rooted in I.C.T in the domain of education to foster and boost knowledge inculcation among young teachers and knowledge acquisition among young learners especially as it relates to the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages. The trust of this paper therefore, is to assess the capability of I.C.T in coping with the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages at primary, secondary and tertiary institution levels. In doing this, some militating factors are identified while some checkmating-measures are also recommended as a way of restoring hope if optimally implemented.

The use of technology in the teaching and learning of languages has become necessary most especially in this era of information and communications technology (I.C.T). Several workshops and learned conferences in the recent times has rekindled the zeal and created awareness of the fact that the ability to use modern technology gadgets to assimilate new information will to a large extent determine how successful and effective teachers and learners will be. Therefore, the field of language teaching is not left out in this regard. The major focus of this paper is to examine how ICT apparatus can be freely manipulated in favour of easy teaching and learning of languages precisely Nigerian Languages. Besides, this paper is set out to prove that if certain conditions of rehabilitation and greater attention by stake holders are strictly adhered to, Nigerian languages can be structurally adequate in dispensing higher knowledge in science and technology.

It is the general belief of scholars, (Okonkwo 2002, Kizerbo 1996, Fishman 1985, etc) that the mother tongue is the best medium for the child to acquire knowledge at school. This claim is confirmed by the 1976 then University of Ife research and 1978 University of Ibadan research on Mother tongue education. Both researches revealed that the child is more at ease in understanding and tackling problems in the languages of his immediate community than in the language he hardly has a good grip of. In most of the developed countries, the trend is towards the standardization and normalization of information technologies with specific linguistic implications. These implications touch on the need for respect for and the promotion of linguistic diversity in technology and information management.

It is without doubt to emphasize here that teaching is becoming one of the most challenging professions in the recent time, probably because of rapid increase in knowledge in our modern society which gives rise to the development of modern technologies to provide modern approaches to the teaching profession in order to stimulate new concepts of teaching that will enhance rapid assimilation of these concepts by learners thereby making teaching and learning easy. In lieu of this view, it becomes imperative for teachers to learn how to use these new technologies in teaching.

Besides, these challenges require teachers to retrain themselves and acquire new

knowledge and skills to face the modern realities of their jobs should they retain their noble profession.

According to Fabika (2008:84), the information age or rather the era of information and communication technology (I.C.T) is one that has witnessed unprecedented transformation in every field of humanity Quoting Salau (2003), Fanika stated that, ICT is seen as the technologies used in collecting, storing, editing and passing of information in various forms which include the use of communication satellite, radio, television, telephone, video, tape, recorders, compact disc, floppy disc, and the personal computers. Quoting Osemwinyem (2008), Fanika submitted that these devices have made ICT an instrument of dynamic and progressive change in our society and as such, have tremendously influenced development of all human endeavours – society, economic, technology, business, labour and education.

The Federal Republic of Nigeria (F.R.N) in the National Policy on Education (2004:17,24) asserts that:

In recognition of the prominent role of information and communications technology in advancing knowledge and skills necessary for effective functioning in the modern world, there is urgent need to integrate information and communication technology into education in Nigeria. Government shall provide necessary infrastructure and training for the integration of I.C.T in the school system in recognition of the role of I.C.T in advancing knowledge and skills in the modern world.

According to F.M.E, (2004), the application of I.C.T in education is known as e-education which is the comprehensive framework for delivery of education using I.C.T as a tool. That is, any form of teaching, learning, management, administration, counseling, and other educational activities that engage the use of I.C.T for its delivery falls within the e-education framework. At this juncture, this paper among other things, will also examine the challenges and prospects of these new technologies in Nigeria education, especially in the era of language education.

Major Objectives of E-education in Nigeria:
Fanika (2008:84) via F.M.E, (2004) listed the major objectives of e-education in Nigeria to include:

i. **Enhancement of access to quality education:**
There is no doubt that e-education has the mechanism of maximizing benefits to many learners by offering undiluted and qualitative education. No matter how large the number of pupils for basic education in Nigeria, the benefits of e-education can be used to their advantage.

ii. **Improve the education delivery system:** I.C.T gadgets re-inforce both Teachers and learners in teaching-learning process. Self-learning of I.C.T packaged education will promote mastery of school subjects by students as well as aid teachers to carry out their jobs effectively.

iii. **Ensure optimal utilization of existing I.C.T resources:** A glance at the education system in the country will reveal series of efforts put in place at the three tiers of government-local, state and federal at implementing some forms of I.C.T packaged programmes.

iv. **Ensure a global competitive education system:** When a global adoption of e-education as a delivery tool is achieved; any nation or country whose educational system does not conform to the global dictate will produce graduates that are not globally acceptable. With the integration of e-education in Nigeria, therefore, the nation

will be on the right course of global competitiveness.

v. **Reduce or eliminate anti-social activities in the school system:** Examination malpractices, students unrest and cultism which have eaten deep into the fabrics of the education system in Nigeria are products of many illicit factors including poor academic preparation of students, but since e-education has the potential of evaluating students' performance and reducing the incidence of vices in the school, these anti-social activities in the school system will be eliminated with time.

The Application of I.C.T Resources

This Paper Enumerate Below Some Selected I.C.T Resources that are Vital to the Teaching of Nigerian Languages.

S/No	I.C.T Resources	Applications
1.	Slide and film strip projectors	Used to project pictures in frame of strip form to aid illustration
2.	Episcope (opaque projector)	Can be used to project real items such as Yam, Orange, etc with any Nigerian language that a teacher is teaching.
3.	Overhead-transparency projectors	Used to show graphic image such as letters, alphabets or names in any Nigerian language.
4.	Cassette and recorders	May be used to record the audio of either music or sounds of words in any Nigerian language.
5.	Flipcharts and multimedia presentation	For showing objects in different Nigeria languages. This could be followed by the word pronunciation of such objects recorded in audio-tape.
6.	Audio visuals	This includes such items as radio, television, etc which could be used to teach or make illustrations in any of the Nigerian languages.
7.	Digital still camera	Gives clear pictures of events locations and other scenes that can given useful ideas in the teaching and learning of any Nigerian language.
8.	Digital video camera	Used to teach recorded life visuals (i.e. related to language or culture depending on the teachers choice).
9.	Computer system	The most versatile I.C.T resource used to stimulate teaching and learning processes in Nigerian languages, it also offers the internet facility which is a major source of current learning in Nigerian languages.

Extract form Enyia (2004:207-209)

The Benefits of Application of I.C.T to Languages Education:
There are appreciable benefits to be derived by integrating I.C.T into the teaching and learning of any of the Nigerian indigenous languages.

According to Egbokhare (2003), the African Language Technology Initiative (ALTI) offers opportunity to researchers to redefine their interest and move in the director of a multidisciplinary interfacing, engaging I.C.T, adopting and localizing technology. He identifies the merits of I.C.T in relation to the benefits it offers African languages, Cultures and people to include:

1. Providing an opportunity to tackle the problem of endangerment and cost effectively.
2. Providing an opportunity to move from Communication Babel to linguistic Pentecost'
3. Providing the bridge between languages, the gateway between cultures and the network between minds.
   He further suggests that in view of the fact that I.C.T offers these opportunities, we should "engage, adopt and deploy it".
4. Storing of data pertaining to different aspects of Nigerian languages and cultures.
5. Enhance accessibility of materials on various Nigerian languages.
6. Facilitating the collaboration of available material resources.

Ways of Exploiting I.C.T Resources for the Development of Nigerian Languages

One very remarkable way to develop any of the major Nigerian languages is the Production of teachers who will teach the languages. But quite unfortunately, according to Isumba (2004:81), there are no teachers in most of the Nigerian languages. Against this backdrop, I.C.T well packaged programmes can be used to checkmate this unfortunate development. With the exploitation of I.C.T resources, one can have wider access, higher quality and low cost. Also, I.C.T can be used to produce literature in any of the Nigerian languages. Similarly, orthography development can be achieved through application of I.C.T resources. Finally, I.C.T application can help to change the entire context of teaching of any of the major Nigerian languages.

In a similar vein, Okwudishus (2004:12) quoting Pope and Golub (2000) contended that in this I.C.T – dominated era, language arts teachers must be ready to "step into the status quo as well as to advance the teaching profession by infusing technology into their teaching.

To this end, language teacher educators on their own part should be part and parcel of this new technological innovation. To buttress this point, Okwudishus, via Pope and Golub went further to highlight seven principles which they describe as touch stones for infusing technology into language arts teachers preparation scheme: they are:

1. Introduce and infuse technology in context;
2. Focus on the importance of technology as a literacy tool;
3. Evaluate critically when and how to use technology in the language arts classroom;
4. Provide a wide range of opportunities to use technology
5. Examine and determine ways of analyzing, evaluating and grading language arts technology project; and
6. Emphasizing issues of equity and diversity.

Factors Militating against Smooth Application of I.C.T Resources in the teaching of Nigerian Languages:

Fanika (2008:89-90) quoting Olubusuyi; (2008) identified several factors that militate against the overall application of I.C.T in teaching and learning to include:

1. **Lack of expertise and skilled manpower:** Owing to lack of sufficient fund, Nigeria has not the capacity to develop the necessary local manpower neither has she the resources to attract the highly skilled and expensive experts abroad. This study is mindful of the fact that skilled manpower for the application of I.C.T in language education is vital to the success of the technology.
2. **Limited internet connectivity:** Internet connectivity, though vigorously pursued in Nigeria is still limited. In some institutions

of higher learning where there is internet connectivity, it is seen to be limited only to the library and information and communications technology (I.C.T) centers and not to offices. These indubitably slow down the pace of development of the system on languages education.

3. **Poor infrastructure:** Nigeria lacks the infrastructural facilities for the full scale development of e-learning facilities, apart from high cost of using technology and maintaining them. Telephone density in rural areas is still low while internet access is concentrated mostly in urban centers and a few institutions of higher learning.

4. **High cost of Acquisition of I.C.T Resources:** Another challenge or constraint to the use of I.C.T resources in Nigerian educational system is high cost of hardware and software and other I.C.T gadgets which many higher institutions are still in need of for smooth teaching and learning. Apart from high cost of purchase, there is also exorbitant cost of maintenance and upgrading of the equipments and the facilities in our higher educational institutions which equally stall the smooth application of I.C.T in language education.

5. **Teacher's attitude:** Another constraint to effective use of e-learning in language education may be attributed to non-familiarity of this technology to most teachers. The fact that most teachers have negative feelings and attitude that the integration of I.C.T into educational system is to pose a threat to the professional roles and images is also extraneous.

6. **Unreliable power supply:** Power supply is not stable in most parts of the country especially in the rural areas. Since I.C.T is sine-qua-non to power usage; this becomes a very serious challenge and constraint to e-learning in language education.

7. **Non-availability of reading materials:** The modern technology has not taken adequate care of most sound systems of Nigeria languages especially in the area of diacritics. The result is that it becomes a Herculean task for writers in these languages to produce enough reading materials for the teaming population of students studying these languages.

Prospects of I.C.T in language education:
I.C.T has the potential to:
1. accelerate, enrich and deepen skills
2. motivate and encourage students in learning
3. contribute to radical changes in the school system
4. strengthen teaching and provide opportunities for connection between the institution and its surrounding communities.
5. help to create economic viability for young teachers.

Conclusion
   For the question on whether any of the major Nigerian languages can be cope in this era of I.C.T, Okeke (2003:67) supported by Chima (2004:9) responded in the affirmative judging from the little efforts already made to equip some of the major Nigerian languages with the where-withal to transmit science and technology. One may be forced to say that vernacular languages are not viable to transmit higher cultures of science and technology. But this is

not so, some major Nigerian languages have today developed to the level of transmitting higher cultures of science and technology especially in the domain of religion, mass media, medicine, etc. Okwudishus (2004:14) reported that some Nigerian languages are already benefiting by having websites and programmes online. According to them, the Hausa language has the privilege of being projected by the B.B.C and other international broadcasting services. Other examples include the development of the Yoruba keyboard reported in (Egbokhare, 2003) and the production of the Nigerian National Anthem in ten Nigerian languages by Mache who thrilled the audience at the pre-independence celebration concert at Abuja on the 29th of September, 2004.

Finally, faced with the immediate necessity to transmit modern science and technology, this paper agrees that any of the major Nigerian languages can transmit these higher cultures though the process has to be gradual with steady hard work and perseverance.

Recommendations

Having seen the importance and some of the constraints of I.C.T in the teaching and learning of Nigerian languages, this paper recommends the following, so as to have a breakthrough in the use of I.C.T programme in the nation's education system.

1. There should be support from Non-Governmental Organizations (NGOs) to augment government efforts especially in the area of funding.
2. Strong government commitment, support and monitoring should be built into the programme.
3. Increasing awareness of the usefulness of I.C.T for enhancing the quality of the teaching-learning processes is needed.
4. Technical experts should be made available within the country while technical teacher education should also be made compulsory so that teachers will be trained and exposed to the use of I.C.T resources.
5. Availability of hardware and software resources within the country should be at finger tips.
6. There should be steady power supply to enable regular and effective use of I.C.T resources in teaching and learning process.

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A. N. E. Chima
Department of Nigeria Languages,
School of Arts,
Alvan Ikoku Federal College of Education,
Owerri, Imo State.